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TOP STORY | EDITOR'S PICK

Atlantic Beach license plate reader cameras raise privacy concerns among locals

KATHLEEN HOPEWELL NEWS-TIMES | Sep 9, 2025 Updated Sep 10, 2025 | 14

Pin represents approximate location of future traffic cameras in Atlantic Beach.

ATLANTIC BEACH - "Yay! A surveillance state! That's what we all wanted, right?"

That was what an anonymous user commented on The Carteret News-Times' coverage of Atlantic Beach's anticipated license plate reader (LPR) cameras.

In the days following the Atlantic Beach Town Council's approval of a contract to purchase two LPR cameras, The News-Times received several comments expressing similar sentiments on the web article, Facebook and even over the phone. How will the cameras be used? Who has access to the footage? What do they mean for individual privacy?

Despite widespread use, N.C. law hazy on LPR cameras

CARTERET COUNTY - Though they may be the first in the county to do so, Atlantic Beach is far...

Automatic LPR cameras don't just capture photos of every passing vehicle; they convert those images of license plates into alphanumeric characters, compare every photographed license plate against official databases on vehicles of interest, and alert law enforcement if a match is found.

While the limited research on how LPR cameras help fight crime has shown they are associated with reduced rates of shootings, motor vehicle thefts and property crimes, they elicit valid concerns from citizens about privacy and the potential for misuse of surveillance technology.

Those local concerns raised to the News-Times prompted further investigation into any additional LPR or other law enforcement cameras in Carteret County, including the towns of Beaufort, Bogue, Cape Carteret, Cedar Point, Emerald Isle, Morehead City, Newport, Peletier and Pine Knoll Shores.

Most towns reported only having generic surveillance cameras for town property, or publicly accessible live streams of beaches and waterways. Officials from both Morehead City and Pine Knoll Shores, however, confirmed the use of law enforcement cameras in those towns.

Morehead City Chief of Police Bryan Dixon did not specify if they used automatic LPR cameras. He instead alluded to how the department, "uses progressive camera technologies in a variety of ways, all within the scope of federal and state law and in accordance with recognized best practices." The cameras Chief Dixon mentioned were vehicle-borne, body-worn, a mobile camera trailer and, "a number of cameras within our building."

Many LPR cameras, like those coming to A.B., are fixed at a single location, but all of the cameras mentioned by Chief Dixon can also come equipped with LPR technology. It is unclear if this is the case for Morehead City.

Chief Dixon did not disclose the location of these cameras, contending that the benefit of doing so is, "outweighed by the potential to jeopardize current and future investigations."

He further said, "all recordings are retained according to established standards of the Department and City, and the requirements of state and federal law."

Pine Knoll Shores' camera system, located at the Town Hall, Public Safety Building, Memorial Park Beach Access and Iron Steam Beach access, is more traditional. While none of these are automatic LPR cameras, PKS Police Chief Ryan Thompson clarified, "the cameras at the Public Safety Building can see license plates, but it is not an automated system where information is automatically run through [the National Crime Information Center] and it does not give us any types of alerts in real time."

Only PKS law enforcement can access the footage, which is stored locally for an average of 30 days, and they can, "go back and search dates and times and review specific footage," or they can search for a license plate, "but we must have a specific license plate ahead of time to search for," Chief Thompson said.

"Nothing is automated with our system, which was intentional. We wanted to balance the expense to our taxpayers and the privacy of our visitors and residents," Chief Thompson explained.

Atlantic Beach plans to install their two automatic LPR cameras, from Verkada, in a fixed location at Captain Stacy's Fishing Center to help, "with public safety and, hopefully, to follow up on leads," per Town Manager John O'Daniel, capturing footage of all traffic going to and from the city's bridge.

Tags: Automatic Number plate Recognition | Atlantic Beach, North Carolina | Surveillance | Carteret County, North Carolina | Photo | Morehead City, North Carolina | Crime Prevention | National Security | Canada | Civil Rights and Liberties | Social Issues | Justice | Issue In Ethics | Other | Technology

(14) COMMENTS

mpjeep Sep 9, 2025 10:49am

As citizens, we need to stand up for our rights against the Carteret County police tracking our movements and spying on us. Some towns in other states have removed LPRs with enough resident pushback.

Shame on Morehead City Chief of Police Bryan Dixon, who mostly gave subjective answers to questions and concerns.

I agree with the Rutherford Institute, who consider LPRs as one of the tools used in what they call "electronic concentration camps."

AB Town Manager John O'Daniel has given little to no details about the town's use of LPRs.

Report | Add Reply

Lucy0806 Sep 9, 2025 12:46pm

GEEZZZZ, the cameras are there for the law enforcement and not shown on the news 4-6 times a day. If you are not doing anything "wrong" then what difference does it make!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Find something else to complain about! Or leave....

Report | Add Reply

TheDude Sep 10, 2025 8:24am

It's a very slippry slope.

Report | Add Reply

Newtechnick Sep 10, 2025 5:11pm

If you're not doing anything wrong? So you don't think that having your reputation dragged through the mud simply because you are driving a car down any road? You think that going to jail in the middle of the night or any other time and then having to deal with the court system so that you can prove that you're innocent instead of them proving that you're guilty is no big deal? The dumbest people on Earth say if you're not doing anything wrong you don't have anything to worry about. That phrase is one of the Staples of the Nazis. Who decides what's right and wrong and who decides when what is Right becomes what's wrong? You can't decide tomorrow that smoking cigarettes is wrong enough to incriminate you and since you've been on camera smoking a cigarette for the last year they get to charge you for smoking cigarettes. If you think what I just said is dumb then we have no need for a further conversation because your intelligence level doesn't meet your shoe size.

Report | Add Reply

guest49972465565b19ad2f1a227c3 Sep 11, 2025 9:51am

Duh, Duh, this is how China and Russia does people. Only politicians are safe from government eyes.

Report | Add Reply

bogueburn Sep 9, 2025 4:57pm

big brother is watching you

Report | Add Reply

mpjeep Sep 9, 2025 6:13pm

I worried that ICE may use camera info.

Report | Add Reply

bluedevils Sep 9, 2025 9:35pm

I feel really uncomfortable about this...

Report | Add Reply

Richardsonnnn Sep 10, 2025 10:13am

More overreach by the corrupt Republicans that run Atlantic Beach what's next ice agents and billboards of Trump's head this ridiculous...

don't you think you can find something better to do with our taxpayers money like fix the roads that need fixed.. create better beach access there's thousands of things that could be done besides violating everybody's rights but what do you expect Republicans mega disgusting

Report | Add Reply

mpjeep Sep 11, 2025 2:47pm

"The greatest tyrannies are always perpetuated in the name of the noblest causes."—Thomas Paine

Report | Add Reply

TheDude Sep 12, 2025 7:50am

"Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety". Benjamin Franklin

Report | Add Reply

tarheelcast Sep 12, 2025 5:52pm

Charlie Kirk's killer would have never been caught without cameras, so yes only the people doing something wrong need to be concern about cameras.

Report | Add Reply

mpjeep Sep 17, 2025 7:36am

Oh, so a license plate reader (LPR) captured the killer?

Report | Add Reply

guest4c85a3fabb95ca12e1108f6f Sep 15, 2025 3:38pm

I do worry about government surveillance of citizen's lives ... but, I am not worried about AB's surveillance of the entering and exiting of my car at the bridge. If I was worried, that would be even more of a valid reason for them to have the camera ...just sayin'

Report | Add Reply

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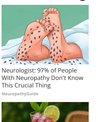
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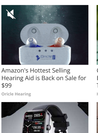
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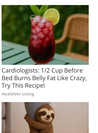
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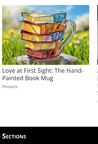
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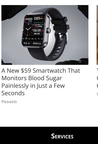
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